

Ana Maria Mascenik

Principal

Robert N. Wilentz School

51 First Street, Perth Amboy, NJ 08861

Category: Elementary School Principal, Pre K-4 – Central Region

When Ana Maria Mascenik became the principal of the Robert N. Wilentz School in 2000, she undertook the leadership of a school that had just consolidated students and faculties from two facilities, two school cultures and two different views on how to improve student learning. She immediately developed a comprehensive school plan to meet the academic and social needs of all the students, over 80% of whom are Hispanic, 12% African American and 4% Caucasian. She involved the staff, parents and community members from both schools through a process of strategic planning where school needs were identified and a school mission was developed.

The Robert Wilentz School lies within Perth Amboy, identified as one of the state's Abbott Districts. Working with the NJDOE's initiatives promoting school improvement in Abbott Districts and with the federal mandate, No Child Left Behind, have made curriculum and instruction an integral part of principal Mascenik's daily job. She quickly addressed the needs of the limited English proficient students with a program to ease their transition to English reading. The result was that there is noticeable success in Language Arts Literacy as measured by the ESPA for the limited English proficient students when compared with their counterparts around the state. Mascenik also created a science position, which resulted in 96% percent of her students scoring proficient or advanced proficient on the science portion of the ESPA.

Student attendance rates have risen and incidents of violence and vandalism are almost non-existent. "Mrs. Mascenik's efforts continue to develop and enhance a school atmosphere that demonstrates caring for all students and motivates her staff to accomplish the school's mission," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Pablo Clausell.

Mascenik wrote a proposal for a Partners in Learning Grant and was awarded \$40,000 that led to the implementation of parental involvement programs at two schools in her district. She encourages parents to participate in one or all of the family programs offered at the school and her ability to speak Spanish has helped to bridge the divide between parents and the school community.

A graduate of Rutgers, Mascenik earned two master's degrees from Kean College. She has worked in the Perth Amboy district since 1976, serving as teacher and vice principal. She belongs to NAESP, NJPSA, ASCD and NABE.

Her familiarity with the district has enabled Mascenik to develop a strong link with the community. Through programs like Career Day and relationships with businesses, alumni and community agencies, Mascenik has facilitated opportunities for student success. She also encourages her staff to be risk takers and to embrace change. "It is my belief that leadership that empowers staff and fosters the potential in others brings the best results," she says. "When people are encouraged to take risks and step outside the box in seeking solutions to problems, good results are increased."